

LESSON TWO: THE FACE OF MISSION

People do a lot of complaining these days about the cost and size of government. It doesn't matter if it is local, state, or federal, the government seems like it is growing ever larger and sending its tentacles into more and more aspects of our lives. Most people, however, do not realize that an expanding government is a relatively recent phenomenon. Prior to World War II and the Great Depression of the 1930s, government was much smaller and leaner. People took care of each other. There was no welfare system at all. In fact, Aid to Families with Dependent Children was developed following World War II to take care of children who were half orphans, their fathers having been killed in the war. Things have changed a great deal in little more than fifty years.

PRAY: Lord Jesus, You have commissioned us to go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to all people. We know that the fields are ripe for harvest. As we seek Your face of love and mercy, help us to see the need to proclaim that love and mercy in our little corner of the world, for people are in need of Your saving grace right around the corner. We pray in Your most precious Name, Lord Jesus. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: In the beginning came the governor's challenge: If each of Mississippi's churches would help just one poor family back on its feet, welfare could end. God, not government, will be the savior of welfare recipients, Gov. Kirk Fordice likes to say. That's how Frances White, a jobless mother facing eviction from a crumbling house, suddenly found herself adopted by a suburban church. There were good deeds (church members paid White's bills), fellowship (they took her kids shopping) and finally redemption (through one congregant, White found a job as a hospital records clerk and now is partly off welfare).

Not long ago, no governor or politician could get away with asking churches to do the antipoverty work that is normally the responsibility of government. And it would have been the height of hokeyness to suggest that churches, synagogues and mosques could cure the drug addicted, feed the hungry, house the homeless, rehabilitate the criminal and lift the poor, better than government. Yet, there is talk of a second welfare revolution: let churches and charities, not government, provide more of the social safety net.

—Joseph Shapiro, Can Churches Save America? *U. S. News & World Report*, September 9, 1999.

BIBLE BASE: Ask a volunteer to read John 4:5-30. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. Why was it unusual for the Samaritan woman to come to the community well to draw her supply of water at noon?

Noon was the hottest time of the day. The women in the village usually came to draw water either early in the morning, or later on in the afternoon when it was cooler. Moreover, the women usually came in groups both for companionship and for protection.

2. Why was the woman surprised when Jesus asked her for a drink of water?

John parenthetically writes that the Jews had nothing to do with the Samaritans, but the situation was more serious than what people think. There was a visceral hatred of Samaritans by Jews. They even prayed in the synagogues that God not allow Samaritans in heaven. To eat the food of a Samaritan was the same as eating swine's flesh. Samaritans were not considered to be neighbors. Therefore, they did not have to be loved. (On the origin of the Samaritans, see 2 Kings 17:24-33.)

3. Why was the woman eager for living water when Jesus offered it?

She was thinking of physical water. She didn't want to have to come to draw water again.

4. Why did Jesus tell her to go and call her husband to Him also?

Jesus was confronting her with her life situation. She was divorced five times and now was living with someone to whom she was not married. In spite of this situation, Jesus continued to minister to her needs. Obviously, the woman was embarrassed. What did she do? She changed the subject. She wanted to talk about religion.

5. How was the woman similar to many people today?

She thought she was an expert on religion. Jesus even told her that she worshiped something about which she knew nothing. There are many people today who think they are experts on Christianity who know nothing about it.

6. Jesus continued to minister to the woman. What was the result?

Ultimately she brought the truth of the Gospel that Jesus was the Messiah to the whole village where she lived. Even when someone with a reputation like the woman had can be used by Jesus as an instrument to expand the mission to others.

7. What lessons can be learned from the way Jesus ministered to the Samaritan woman?

We can learn not to pre-judge people because of their appearance or reputation. All people need to hear the Gospel, because it is God "...who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

CHALLENGE: Look around the neighborhood in which your congregation is located. Are there people who literally live in the shadow of the steeple whom you can help? Try to find a family with needs and help them. Don't forget to tell them about Jesus as you help them.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: The greatest mission field we face is not some faraway land. The strange and foreign culture most American evangelicals fear is not across the ocean. It's barely across the street. The culture most lost to the Gospel is our own—our children and neighbors. It's a culture that can't say two sentences without referencing a TV show or a pop song, and that can't remember what it was like to have to GET UP and change channels. It's a culture more likely to have a body part pierced than it is to know why Sarah laughed (Genesis 18:9-14). It's a culture that we stopped evangelizing, and have instead declared a culture war upon.

—Dwight Ozard in *Prism* (July/August 1996), quoted in *Christianity Today*, March 2, 1998, 62.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord Jesus, You gave Your life so that all people could have life everlasting. Help us to seek Your face by proclaiming Your life, death, and resurrection to people in the entire world, but don't let us forget the little corner of the world in which we live. Open our eyes to see the opportunities You have placed before us. Then, open our hearts to avail ourselves of those opportunities to proclaim Your Gospel in word and deed. In Your Name we pray. Amen.